

## **Legal Services Board (LSB) Draft Equality Scheme Consultation and Business Plan 2010/11**

### **Response of the Black Solicitors Network**

The Black Solicitors Network (BSN) was established in 1995. It is the primary voice of black solicitors in England and Wales; committed to achieving equality of access, retention and promotion of black solicitors. It is the leading body that represents the interests of the UK's existing and aspiring black solicitors. Current membership embraces over 6000 people from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds.

We are pleased that the LSB has made a public commitment to place equality and diversity at its heart and that it has already begun a dialogue with representative groups including BSN as set out in the consultation paper and Business Plan.

BSN has had an opportunity to meet the LSB and discuss the draft equality scheme and how the LSB intends to carry out its statutory duties.

In setting a vision for clear regulatory structures, which command public confidence, we hope that the LSB also strives to command the respect and confidence of those whom it regulates. Unfortunately, for reasons that are well documented, BME solicitors do not have a sufficient level of confidence in its approved regulator and we hope the LSB will ensure that appropriate steps are taken to remedy this.

In improving access to justice, the provision of legal services must be affordable to the provider as well as the consumer. While we welcome competition we expect care to be taken that quality is not driven down for price and that manipulations of the market by new entrants is not allowed to lead to the exclusion of disadvantaged groups whether as provider or consumer.

We hope the LSB will also consider third parties such as insurance companies who can have an indirect effect on the provision and cost of the provision of legal services.

We welcome the creation of diversity forums but for these to work effectively, there must be cross-referencing and non-exclusivity. The proposal to encourage measurable outcomes is welcome sitting well with BSN's Diversity League Table, which measures actual performance against a number of equality strands.

Cordella Bart-Stewart

Chair - Black Solicitors Network

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